

**Dinner speech on the occasion of the presentation of the
British-German Community Medal**

Horst Teltschik
London, October 20, 2009

Your Excellencies,
ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to be here and I know, I have to sing for my supper – and for getting the award.

First of all I would like to thank the German – British Forum and the British Chamber of Commerce in Germany for inviting me and honouring me with this award. I am quite moved because I never thought this will happen to me by the British.

But I tell you quite frankly: I deserve this award. During my eight years of government service, I always did my best to involve my British counterparts in all discussions we had at that time either on European affairs or on transatlantic issues or on our relations with various Warsaw Pact countries. Lord Charles Powell, the closest adviser to PM Thatcher, Jacques Attali, not only adviser to President Mitterand but in some respect President as well and I were once called by the Time Magazin the “European gang”.

I am happy, that Christopher Mallaby is with us this evening. At my time in the Chancellery he was one of the best Ambassadors to work with. He received all the information he requested. But it was quite difficult for him to explain the policies of his Prime Minister.

On behalf of Chancellor Helmut Kohl I had to brief PM Thatcher several times at Downing Street. Once I mentioned that Helmut Kohl was open-minded with respect to a controversial issue, and she immediately interrupted me by saying: “Oh, Mr. Teltschik, I am not open-minded”. It did not come as a surprise.

Even Helmut Kohl always got very clear – cut answers. Once we had a meeting at Chequers. After his lengthy introduction, Margaret Thatcher took off her glasses, looked at Helmut Kohl and saying: “Helmut, no, no, no!” There was no doubt about her position.

During several EG – summits, Charles Powell took me aside to speak to his PM who explained to me what she was expecting the Chancellor to do. Unfortunately, we couldn’t always comply with that.

After Margaret Thatcher had left office, I met her by coincidence in Aspen, Colorado, where she was giving a speech on European affairs. It was quite a tough one. Nevertheless, after her speech I said hello to her. She immediately took hold of me and said: ”Mr. Teltschik, you have to go back to politics, but on Europe I am right”.

Frankly, I very much enjoyed doing business with her. It was never easy but her positions have always been clear-cut and unambiguous. That makes it on the one hand easier to cope with. On the other hand it is more difficult to reach a compromise – the usual outcomes of European summits. But our strategy was quite simply figuring out if she would disagree.

Once that was clear, we tried hard from the very beginning to isolate her. As soon as she realized that she was alone with her position, she frequently gave way.

We are now celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the wall. And there were obstacles Germany had to overcome from the crumbling of the East German regime to unification.

Chancellor Helmut Kohl was not really surprised about Margaret Thatcher critical or even angry response to his well-known ten – point speech given on November 21, 1989 in the German Parliament. He wanted to take the lead in the debate, on a national and international level. This debate about the events in the GDR and its possible repercussions was becoming increasingly heated. At that point in time, it was perfectly obvious, that experts as well as politicians were starting to consider unification of Germany as one of the options. Both, President Mitterand and President Bush, had already publicly mentioned unification as one of the possible options.

Who else then Chancellor Helmut Kohl should have taken the lead in this ongoing public discussion? In his speech he explained to the public that he would now strive for the unification of Germany and how he go about it, step by step, without mentioning any timeframe.

Sure, Chancellor Kohl, had surprised everybody, even his own government and his own party. But he wanted to prevent anybody else from taking the initiative. Neither Francois Mitterand nor Margaret Thatcher or Hans Dietrich Genscher were very amused about not being consulted ahead of time. Even George W. Bush had received Chancellor's speech just before delivery so he could not call beforehand.

If Chancellor Kohl had consulted President Mitterand, PM Thatcher and President Bush before his speech, what would have been the most probable response? Two of them would have replied: Helmut, you know that I am in favour of the German unity, but we have to be careful. Don't hurry. Let us meet first to discuss what the repercussions could be on Gorbachev and on the future of Europe and the Atlantic Alliance. One of the three would have said: Helmut, I love Germany so much that I prefer two of it. If you go for German unification now, Gorbachev would not survive.

Gorbachev's reply is well-known: He condemned Kohl's speech as a dictate but stayed in office. Nine weeks later on February 10, 1990, Gorbachev met with Chancellor Kohl in Moscow and officially agreed that it is now up to both German governments, to decide about unification and timetables.

Now the FCO publication on German unification is available. Thanks to David I could read Charles Powell's minutes to PM Thatcher about a three – hour meeting with me in my office, just one day before Chancellor Kohl went to Moscow. From my point of view it was a very good and friendly meeting. We are still good friends. Charles explained to me, why his Prime Minister is so critical of Chancellor Kohl's policy of unification. His report about my statements is mostly right, but the PM got it wrong. She noted: “ Nationalism with a vengeance”. What a misunderstanding!

But what surprised me most, was Charles' report about his own statements. I don't recall any threats or reproaches, for example, “that Germany was developing tunnel vision about

unification”, if we “were not prepared to consult collectively with us, then we would have to talk to the others, including the Russians, without the Germans”.

And we were more amazed than shocked reading in the Independent on Sunday about a meeting of six British and American experts, whom PM Thatcher summoned to Chequers in March 1990 to discuss Germany and the implications of unification. The memorandum, written by Charles, was leaked and there we could learn about our German national characteristics including: ”angst, aggressiveness, assertiveness, bullying, egotism, inferiority complex, sentimentality”. Quite a lesson about ourselves.

Well, Edward Pearce, wrote in the Guardian on March 13, 1991: “We have just had a glimpse into the entirely flexible mind of a British civil servant. Like the Vicar of Bray, Powell could adapt to five kinds of theology over five reigns”.

But I am sorry to say: at the time, PM Thatcher had marginalized herself. We didn’t really care about her opinion.

And there was Douglas Hurd. We relied on him and on FCO and he was very helpful bringing the 2 + 4 negotiations to a conclusion. Thank you very much.

Two conclusions remain important for Germany:

1. Chancellor Kohl was more surprised about President Mitterand’s initial reluctance to support the process of unification than about Margaret Thatcher’s. Mitterand’s main concern had been, that a united Germany, then stronger than France, would not continue its close partnership with France and the process of European integration. That was the reason, why in January 1990 Chancellor Helmut Kohl proposed a new common German – French initiative for a Political Union, which was approved by all member states at the Dublin Summit in April; later on followed by the Economic and Monetary Union and by the introduction of the EURO.
2. A united Germany was and is only acceptable to all European neighbors and the US as long as we are common allies in the Atlantic Alliance. A non – aligned or neutral Germany would have been a nightmare for all our neighbours. The German people must never forget their history. Just look how nervous Poland and the Czech Republic react when Germany is attempting to develop a close and friendly relationship with Russia. Therefore Germany’s membership in NATO and the EU is part of Germany’s raison d’état. Both alliances have been a prerequisite for unifying Germany. They remain a prerequisite to overcome distrust against Germany. Helmut Kohl knew that from the very beginning. If Downing Street had taken note of all of his speeches and public statements since 1982, they would not have questioned his intentions.

Twenty years after the end of the Cold War, we are facing other implications:

1. NATO had to adjust its strategy to new challenges and threats, we have been facing since that time. Its strategy was revised several times. In April this year, NATO has again decided to review its strategy. NATO is still trying to define its future role. After the war in Kosovo and now fighting a war for eight years in Afghanistan we still don’t know, whether NATO should just have regional responsibilities or at the end a global role? Should we enlarge NATO further or not? Why Albania? What about Georgia and the Ukraine? Should we in the long run allow Russia into NATO, as President Clinton once proposed to President Yelzin? What about Japan, Australia

or New Zealand or others? Some in the US want to see a special relationship between those countries and NATO.

Great Britain is proud of its special relationship with the US, supporting them with troops in Iraq and Afghanistan more than any other NATO member state. Britain should take the lead in shaping a new NATO strategy.

2. The European Union is still undergoing two difficult processes: the deepening of integration and enlargement. Two key questions have not yet been answered: a so called wait and see – approach: What should be the final status of the EU: the United Nations of Europe or a confederation of states or just a free trade area, as the British seem to prefer? How large should the EU be at the very end? Should Turkey or Israel or others at some point become members of the EU? Our British friends will not and should not take a lead, but they should accept that others would like to move forward with integration. Great Britain could follow later or not at all. The EU remains a unique success story – whether our British or American friends believe it or not.

3. In November 1990, there was a CSCE summit in Paris. All 35 Presidents and Heads of government signed a “Charter for a new Europe”. After the end of the Cold War they wanted to start “a new era of democracy, peace and unity”. They agreed on common principles how to shape the new Europe. They developed a mechanism to avoid confrontations, to manage crisis and to settle conflicts peacefully. What a vision!?! What a dream!?! It had reminded me of the famous speech by Martin Luther King: “I have a dream...” Should a united, a free and democratic Europe from Vancouver to Vladivostok not be our dream? In May 1991, President Mitterand said in Aachen: “For a long time, Europe has not had so many reasons for hope.”

In 1990, the Europeans for the first time had the opportunity to build a common European House, as Gorbachev put it, to create a community of free states founded on the rule of law and guaranteeing the security of all.

After a century of two World Wars with over 200 million people killed, what could have been better for peace, freedom and security than such an All European system of Peace and Security?

The Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir once said: “Who has not a dream, is not a realist”.

But in substance nothing has really happened since 1990. The CSCE was renamed. Now known as OSCE, it is mainly taking care of human rights and observing elections. For Russia, OSCE is now mainly an instrument to interfere in its internal affairs.

We must not care about Russia’s complaints but what about an All European system of Peace and Security?

In June 2008, President Medwedew gave a speech in Berlin suggesting again a “European Security Order from Vancouver to Vladivostok”. He only mentioned few principles, avoiding any details. A Russian official told me, that otherwise the West would have immediately thrown the proposal off the table. So far there was no substantial response by anyone. The first step was done few weeks ago by President Obama and President Medwedew. They have agreed on a common working group to follow up on the Russian proposal. The Europeans are again in a wait and see – position. It is easier to criticize a possible outcome, but more difficult to come up with a proposal of their own.

4. Let me conclude with a last implication. It was President George Bush in 1991 demanding a new world order after the end of the bi – polar world. There was no response by anyone. But we have got a new world order, a uni – polar one with the US as the only world power. After the US military intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan Russia, China and India started to question a world order, dominated mainly by the US. They are now demanding a multi – polar world. Now we are moving in this direction. Possible poles are for sure the US, China, India, Japan, Brazil, Russia and hopefully the EU. Such a multi – polar world order reminds me of the European order in the 18./19th centuries, where various great powers as France and mainly Great Britain on the one side were trying hard to counterbalance other great powers such as Prussia, Russia and the Austrian-Hungarian Empire or vice versa. The German Chancellor von Bismarck was famous for upholding this balance of power. They all wanted to prevent the dominance of one single power in Europe. Nevertheless it resulted in two devastating world wars.

Therefore we all are forced to play an active role and to take up global responsibility in one way or the other. And we should be aware that the US and the EU are natural partners. Who else could it be today?

A lot remains to do. I didn't even mention economic globalization with all its repercussions, facing this nightmare of a global financial crisis and recession. I didn't mention arms control and arms reduction. No progress at all during the last twenty years.

Nevertheless, mainly we Europeans and our American friends have many reasons to be grateful for what happened twenty years ago. After that peaceful revolution we got new opportunities to shape a peaceful Europe and a better world. No generation before us got similar opportunities. They even didn't dare to dream of it.

What we need now are politicians, business leaders, academics and social elites of all kinds with a historic understanding, far-sighted, strategic and global thinkers, with the courage to take decisions and to act. We have got new challenges and new threats but new opportunities as well. Douglas Hurd was correct to say that we could have made more of the opportunities handed to us in 1989/90.